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BLACK BOURGEOISIE-REVISITED AGAIN *A'Jamal R. Byndon*

(The following is part of a larger article by Brother Byndon. It has been condensed due to space considerations.)

After reading Martin Kilson's 1983 article, "The Black Bourgeoisie Revisited," one would infer that the group E. Franklin Frazier was referring to is now virtually non-existent. However, this insidious group is still around. Kilson's article is a bonafide apology for elitism. There are a number of misleading assumptions stated which could lead naive readers to erroneous conclusions. For instance, Kilson states: "By 1980 about two out of every five employed blacks were working in white collar jobs... The number of Blacks completing high school increased from 42 percent to 75 percent between 1960 and 1980, and today nearly one out of every ten college students is black, up from 6.1 percent two decades ago" (pg. 85).

What Kilson fails to mention is that, historically, *Africans in the U.S. have experienced substantially higher unemployment than whites. Because of the perverse and prevailing practice of job reservation, Africans suffer from acute and chronic income shortages. Secondly, white-collar jobs held by Africans are not equal to ones held by white workers. In other words, Africans in comparable positions tend to earn less than their white counterparts. In addition, with the increase in service jobs(clerical workers, cashiers, sales clerks, and other functionary positions), the straw-man is established that "...two out of every five employed Africans were in white collar jobs." The question is what kinds of white-collar jobs are those Africans performing? Chances are, they are not working in managerial positions or as high-level executives.

Spratlen(1982) writes: "About one white in eight is a manager or official; but only one Black in 27 holds jobs with official status in management and administration. Among professionals the ratios are one white in 10 and one Black in 32"(pg. 75). Apologists of the Kilson mold want to disprove, despite all the evidence to the contrary, many of Frazier's characterizations of the Black Bourgeoisie. In looking at their manipulation of data, it is obvious that the intentions of these writers are suspect.

The growth of the Black Bourgeoisie is small indeed and its members few and far between. When one reads that Africans' income status has dropped in percentage, compared to that of whites', then it is apparent that something is wrong. According to the Bureau of the Census, from 1971 to 1981 the median income of Africans decreased four percentage points as compared to whites'. In short, African families now earn 56 percent of whites' income.

Staples(1984) writes: "A little noted statistic is the fact that, as Blacks become more educated, the unemployment rate and income differential between them and white peers is greater. In 1980 the U.S. Census revealed the unemployment rate for Black male college graduates was 5.3 percent while the rate for similar white males was only 1.6 percent. In the data, nearly 60 percent of Black college raduates polled reported having experienced racial discrimination in applying for a job, compared to less than a third of Blacks with less than a high school education"(pg. 3). Kilson's premise is that Africans have made tremendous progress. He cites a few examples to support his faulty premise. In his article, he uses a barrage of figures to illustrate this so-called "improvement" in Africans' living conditions. As a demonstration of the absurdity of his logic, he makes the point that African women improved in acquiring white-collar positions: 14 percent for African women as compared to 17 percent for white women. The fact is that African women are substantially more apt to experience a high level of poverty. Moreover, when one reads that 35.6 percent of all Africans fall below the government definition of poverty and that African women are three times more likely than white women to be in this category, then one wonders how significant is this "improved" condition of African women.

In comparative research, it is asinine for writers to use percentages based on small numbers to evaluate the level of alleged "improvement" made by Africans against the backdrop of white economic and other status. A good example of this can be found in Kilson's analysis: "College-educated black males in teaching declined by 94 percent between

*"African," as used throughout this article, refers to ancestry, not place of birth.

1960 and the early '70s, while black males in engineering increased by 194 percent, in the natural sciences by 200 percent, and in business management by 262 percent" (pg. 86). If one examines the raw numbers, it is found that the figures for Africans are infinitesimal. Such is reflective of a statistical ploy used commonly by many apologists for the caste system in support of their assertion that times are getting better for us.

Considering that, historically, Africans have been virtually locked out of certain occupations--such as engineering, natural sciences, and business management, the increases mentioned in the above paragraph represent very little in actual numbers of African people working in these fields.

Throughout Kilson's article, the lap-dog approach toward boning up the Black Bourgeoisie is apparent. Kilson would have us believe that the Black Bourgeoisie, both of the present period and during the time of Frazier's research, have power. He writes: "To one degree or another one hundred Black men is replicated in numerous local and national associations. These associations are now the dominant agencies shaping a new black/white leadership symbiosis and a new bourgeois identity among Afro-Americans. Unlike the pre-1960s associations, the new ones have greater professionalism and more viable mainstream linkage. They no longer have to respond to the frustration associated with racism as did their predecessors"..(pg. 88). Throughout the article, the message being delivered is that elite Negroes are "taking care of business." However, a moron can discern that many of the problems we face stem from the economic rape of our communities by white businesses and the abandonment of our concerns by some of our most highly trained and educated who are absorbed into these enterprises.

In THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE, Frazier speaks of the African middle class' obsession with displaying opulent lifestyles. The same symbols of wealth and power--debutante balls, flashy jewelry and clothes, luxury automobiles, hobnobbing with white socialites, etc.--with which the Black Bourgeoisie of Frazier's period are those which their modern-day versions are obsessed with.

Is it possible that Kilson is so naive as to be unable to differentiate between actual power and the symbols of power?

In his article, Kilson makes allusion to William Wilson's book, THE DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE. At times it seems that Kilson, like Wilson, hits the fantasy track and, in a feverish state of wishful thinking, suggests that we Africans might be in the stage of racial neutrality. Such a belief that "status-deracialization" will one day come in America is akin to a belief that Africans would be welcomed, as members, into the Ku Klux Klan. The naivete displayed in this article is apparent when it refers to the Ku Klux Klan as "hoodlums." Certainly, to the extent that the Klan violates the law, its members are hoodlums. But this hoodlum characteristic is profoundly outweighed by the fact that the Klan is a genuine thread of the American social fabric. It is well known that closet, and sometimes open, sympathizers of the Klan have made it all the way to the White House.

Africans at the lower-income levels will have to re-examine the theme of Frazier's works. Although his major pieces of research were done over 30 years ago, it is obvious that nothing has really changed. During Mr. Reagan's first inauguration, when Ben Vereen(aka White People's Favorite Boy) appeared in blackface, it was the signal for lower-caste/class Africans to expect the worst--including from the Black Bourgeoisie.

Traditionally, such fly-by-night academicians, such as Kilson, and turncoat "leaders" opt for money over ethical/moral values, the material over principles, and whites over Africans. They have long sold their souls for ten shares of stock. In view of the cruel parodies played on us, one day, they will come to see the plot: that we are still at the bottom of the heap, as E. Franklin Frazier demonstrated in THE BLACK BOURGEOISIE.

Editor's note: "bourgeoisie," as used in this article, does not have the classic meaning, "ruling class," but refers to African people in the U.S. who are wealthy in comparison to other African folks here and who have a frame of reference or state of mind which is similar to or the same as that of their Caucasian counterparts.

From the Chairman

In our introductory preview of Afrikan history, references were made to the common origin of the people whom the white world would prefer to call "Negroes." That we are here studying a single race, not races, and a single people, not peoples, is the theoretical basis and guiding principle of our study of Black History. We are, therefore, primarily concerned with those things which are characteristically Afrikan, those things which were particularly universal among Afrikan people, from one end of the continent to the other and which indicated an ancient common culture of the Black Civilization. On this we stand!

When, if ever, Black people actually organize as a race in their various population centers, they will find that the basic and guiding ideology they now seek and so much need is embedded in their own traditional philosophy and constitutional system - simply waiting to be extracted and set forth. And, while work in this field has yet to be sufficiently advanced, we do know that some of the most fundamental and basic principles of the Afrikan way of life can be found in our ancient Afrikan Constitution(Read Chancellor Williams' DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION).

In DESTRUCTION OF BLACK CIVILIZATION, you will find twenty-one articles of the traditional Afrikan Constitution, articles which speak of customary laws; family; government; extended family; land; children; economic, political, and military systems. Over the centuries, many have interpreted these ancient tribal laws and customs to fit their own conniving ways and inform our brothers and sisters in ways that help in their purpose--to foment confusion through miseducation.

The HARAMBEE FLAME is the publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, and in the coming months, we encourage the brothers of this organization to make use of the FLAME to speak out on issues that are of concern to them so that the people in the communities can read about what we are doing to re-educate American-born Afrikans incarcerated here. And to all our subscribers and other readers of the FLAME, we encourage you to participate with us because many of us, afterall, will, one day, be your neighbors.

Editorial Addendum

Our chairman, Ajabu, mentions that many of those of us who are locked up will return and be your neighbors. The question implied by that statement is whether we will be good neighbors or persons who will be your victimizers, persons you will need to lock your doors and windows from, who will seek to sell drugs to you or/and to your children, etc. The choice is not only ours. It is yours too. In the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, we spend much time and energy in trying to transform American-born African prisoners from the kinds of persons who might not be able to be trusted to the kinds of persons in whom we can place confidence in and, indeed, look to for leadership and guidance.

Ajabu mentions the study of important traditional African principles. Having been so thoroughly Americanized, we are commonly ignorant of such principles and follow, instead, the American principles of greed, one-upmanship, materialism, and individualism. And who is this "we"? It is not just we African folks who are locked up but we generally, from he or she who is elected by us to a political position and winds up representing everyone's interests but ours to he or she who rips off the pension checks of our elderly from their mailboxes.

In the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization, we know the psychological devastation we have suffered at the hands of American institutions. We see far too many of our fellow African prisoners treating each other such that it is made clear that they think of themselves and each other as "niggers." Through the education programs that we present at our meetings, through the FLAME, and through other opportunities that come, we try very hard to replace, in ourselves and in our Brothers, the psychological "niggerism" with a healthy pride in our African selves and an adherence to helpful and positive values. Since most of us will again be your neighbors, you have a stake in the success of our efforts. When we call upon you to assist in our education programs and other projects, be a Brother or Sister to us. Don't be jive.

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The HARAMBEE FLAME is the monthly publication of the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Org. We welcome your comments.

FROM OTHER SOURCES:
AFRICAN HISTORY

Introduction This special 'African History' edition of "From Other Sources" is presented in observance of February - "black" History Month. Moreover, it is presented both as an affirmation and a recogniton as well as a rejection: an affirmation of the ties of U.S.-born Africans to the African continent and recognition of the accomplishments of African people wherever we are or have been, and a rejection of the ludicrous idea and observance of a "black" history month which both commonly excludes the history of our Sisters and Brothers in Africa and elsewhere outside the United States and gives honor to African people in the U.S. whose "accomplishments" were made at the expense of our interests.

Aside from the fact that we should be mindful of our history for twelve months of the year rather than only one, any observance of a month dedicated to our history has to be rooted in our beginnings. And those beginnings were not in America but were in Africa. Just as it would be ridiculous to leave Sojourner Truth out of a study of our history, it would be ridiculous to leave out Queen Nzinga(Queen of what is now the nation of Angola who, during her reign in the late 1500s through the early 1600s, fought against the Dutch and others to protect her country from European colonization).

The fact that so many of us ignore the African continent, as well as other African population centers in other parts of the world outside of the U.S., is either evidence of great ignorance on our parts or of our rejection of our African identity. That so many of us, during this month, spend so much time recognizing the "achievements" of American-born Africans who have acted on behalf of the U.S. Caucasian Establishment, while disregarding the accomplishments and efforts of American-born Africans who have clearly acted on our behalf, suggests that many of us do, as Malcolm said, "love the master more than we love ourselves." We should not, of course, pretend that there were not Wilson Goode or Gatsha Buthelezi types in our history. Rather, in speaking of them, we should point out the negative functions they served and use them as examples of the kinds of people we should not be.

This month should be a time of reflection for us--reflection on the positive as well as the negative. In this special edition of "From Other Sources," we will be focusing on the positive and hope that the information presented will serve to inspire and motivate you toward a higher level of effort and activity for the benefit of us all.

MEDICINE

Ebers Papyrus(Egypt, 1555 BC) - "A prescription for a medical tampon designed to prevent pregnancy, requiring the following: 'A mixture of the tips of the shrub of accacia and honey, made into a tampon and inserted into the vagina in the form of an elongatedly thin suppository.' The chemical reaction is that accacia fermentation breaks down into lactic acid, one of the spermicidal agents used in contraceptive jellies today." --Source: BLACK MAN'S RELIGION by Dr. Yosef Ben-Jochannon

LITERATURE

"...Afro-Arab literature begins with a poet whose place in Arabic literature is like Homer's in the West. The oldest extant anthology of Arabic poetry are the seven 'Mo'allaqat'(Golden Odes), the poems 'raised to a place of honour because of their exquisiteness': those already acknowledged as masterpieces in pre-Islamic times and as such suspended in the Kaaba at Mecca. One of the poets of the 'Mo'allaqat' is Antar Ibn Shaddad al 'Absi, often known in English as Antar,...Antar died in A.D. 615. He is thus the first author of African descent we know of who wrote in verse. But besides his his famous Ode he wrote many of the thousand and more poems which are spread over the 'Antar Romance'...The 'Antar Romance' is ... 'the first classical work concerned with colour prejudice'." --Source: NEO-AFRICAN LITERATURE A HISTORY OF BLACK WRITING by Janheinz Jahn

POLITICS

"The idea of Pan-Africanism first arose as a manifestation of fraternal solidarity among Africans and peoples of African descent. It was originally conceived by a West Indian barrister, Mr. Henry Sylvester-Williams of Trinidad, who practised at the English bar

FROM OTHER SOURCES

at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the present. It appears that during his undergraduate days and after, Mr. Sylvester-Williams established close association with West Africans in Britain and later acted as legal adviser to several African chiefs and other native dignitaries who visited the United Kingdom on political missions to the Colonial Office.

"To combat the aggressive policies of British imperialists Mr. Sylvester-Williams took the initiative in convening a Pan-African conference in London in 1900 as a forum of protest against the aggression of white colonizers and, at the same time, to make an appeal to the missionary and abolitionist traditions of the British people to protect the Africans from the depredations of the Empire builders..." (Henry Sylvester-Williams, born 1868 in Trinidad, was an elementary school teacher who later studied and practised law in England. He travelled extensively in South Africa, the United States and Canada. He returned to Trinidad where he was admitted to the Bar. He died in Port of Spain on March 26, 1911.)
--Source: AN ABC OF COLOR by W.E.B. DuBois

INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

"In the fourth century B.C., the great Library of Alexandria was founded in Egypt by the first king of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. A half century later this library housed a fine collection of about one million volumes. In these books was gathered the knowledge of the ancient world; and it included valuable works in science, mathematics, technology, literature, and history."

"The University of Sankore in Timbuktu enjoyed high prestige as a seat of higher education during the reign of Askia the Great of the Songhay Empire, in the sixteenth century. Its professors corresponded with and visited other universities in Morocco and Egypt. At an earlier period under the rule of the Mali monarchs, this same university maintained contacts with similar institutions in Moorish Spain. In the middle of the sixteenth century a large and learned society of literati flourished in Timbuktu; and in addition the city was filled by numerous Sudanese students, eager in their pursuit of knowledge and virtue. The most scholarly and celebrated professors established schools, where they lectured to bodies of students." --Source: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN CIVILIZATIONS by John G. Jackson

MUSIC

"Most Ethiopian authorities credit Yared with having invented Ethiopic (music)notation. 'Saint Yared', the greatest of all Ethiopian scholar-musicians, lived during the reign of King Gebre Meskel(476-571)."
--Source: ROOTS OF BLACK MUSIC by Ashenafi Kebede

THEATRE

"The African Grove...(was) founded in the season of 1820-21 by a Mr. Brown(his first name is not known) and a group of black actors for their own recreation. This stage, located in lower Manhattan at Bleecker and Mercer Streets, had a capacity of three or four hundred persons...The African Grove was the first professional black theatre in America." --Source: BLACK THEATRE U.S.A. Edited by James V. Hatch

ARMED RESISTANCE

"...in the course of the War of 1812, thousands of black fugitives from slavery fled to the Florida wilderness and many allied themselves with the Indians who were based there. Then, in 1816, one group of approximately three hundred of these black fugitives--including women and children--found an abandoned English fort(Fort Appalachiola), which a group of Seminole Indians had occupied, and which the Seminoles now turned over to their black allies. Repeatedly, the group of outlyers--aided by their Native American allies--used the fort on the northwest coast of Florida not only as a sanctuary from slavery, but as a base for continued attacks against the slaveholders."
--Source: THE OTHER AMERICAN REVOLUTION by Vincent Harding

"She(Queen Candace of the Meroitic Sudan) impressed all Antiquity by her stand at the head of her troops against the Roman armies of Augustus Ceasar."
--Source: THE AFRICAN ORIGIN OF CIVILIZATION by Cheikh Anta Diop

Poetry

DOWN TO THIS

from imhotep's ushering in of the practice of medicine
nubia's mothering of script
from benin's sculpted ivory heads
fine countenances in bronze
nzinga's might
her strength against the hordes from portugal
from the center of learning at timbuktu
seat of light for knowledge-thirsty minds
who to that place flocked from around the world
those black ones
masters of the seas
(it is believed they were sudanese)
who sailed their ships to american shores
those in whom the olmecs were so pleased
they did carved heads of them in memory
from these so glorious events and times
from such great women and men
sprung so marvelously up from africa's soil
how did it all come down to this
to where our people stand on arid land
holding empty bowls in bony hands
before television cameras to plead
what insidious tricks of history
have led us to this state
in which the lot of so many of us
is that of misery
how did it all come down to this
to where our azanian tribes
are ruled by those of alien roots
and though outnumbering them by very many
must fiercely struggle from the ground
to get up from underneath their boots
how did it all come down to this
to where we african folks of american birth
reject our earth-colored hues
and deny our own self-worth
praying to this white man's god
scrambling to get to church
in feet pinched by the white man's shoes
how did it all come down to this
spirits of another place and time
when will this stony path come smooth
the gnawing shackles be removed
when will we gather up our strength
to break the fix that we've been in
to walk proud in the sun's face again.

-Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa
(aka David Rice)
Editor